NEW COLLEGE

MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE, LONDON.

Address

TO

THE STUDENTS,

DELIVERED AT THE CLOSE OF THE SESSION, 1887-8,

BY

T. SADLER, PH.D.,

VISITOR.

"The College adheres to its original principle of freely imparting Theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular Theological doctrines."

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ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

Once again it has fallen to me to address to you a few parting words of sympathy and encouragement. And I have the more pleasure in fulfilling this duty, because, from having listened to your papers and sermons at the Examination, and from other means of judging, I think I may congratulate you on having pursued your studies during the session faithfully and successfully, and in an earnest spirit, which itself is a good augury for your future usefulness.

I know not in what way I can better offer you encouragement than by dwelling, for a little while, on the great opportunities we enjoy through our free position as students and ministers. If it were not for some real advantages, we might reasonably feel compunction at the price paid for this position by those of our fathers who won it for themselves, and have left it to us as an inheritance. It was bought, as so many of the best things in this world have to be bought, by suffering.

In 1644, when Presbyterianism was in power, and a deputation of five Independent divines craved for toleration, Thomas Fuller tells us the Presbyterians "highly opposed it,"—"such who desired most ease and liberty for their sides, when bound with Episcopacy, now girding their own government the closest

about the consciences of others." There were large-minded and large-hearted men among them, notably Richard Baxter; but, as a body, they were intolerant, and justified the reproach that "exact concurrence with the Presbyterian Government was a kind of conscience-prison, whilst accurate conformity to the Scotch Church was the very dungeon thereof."

At the time of the Restoration, however, the rigour of the Presbyterians had been so far relaxed that comprehension was all that was asked of Charles II. by the deputation which waited on him at Breda. Then followed the Act of Uniformity, passed by the slender majority of six, and supported by those grievous persecutions by which an attempt was made to banish Nonconformity from the land. But out of these persecutions arose, purified as by fire, the noblest champions of religious liberty in the whole history of the Church, the men who, at the Salters' Hall Conference, carried the Bible against a creed by four, the authority of the Bible being to them the authority, not of everything in the Bible, but of its plain teaching, and especially of its definitions of true religion.

Fully to understand what these men had become, we must look in upon them in 1772, as they appear in some unpublished documents in my keeping,—the Minutes of the Three Denominations in and about the Cities of London and Westminster. After thirty-seven years of persecution, the Nonconformists were tolerated on condition of subscribing the doctrinal articles of the Church of England. For upwards of eighty years the condition remained in the statute-book, though by no means always complied with; but, in 1772, a Bill was brought into Parliament substituting for subscription to the doctrinal articles of the Church of England a general acceptance of the Scriptures as the standard of faith and practice. It was what the English Presbyterians themselves held and taught in their pulpits; but through the sufferings they had endured for conscience' sake, they had fallen so in love with liberty that they objected to any subscrip-

tion whatever; they desired absolute freedom from the imposition of articles of faith—even their own. I do not think much of a man who only objects to having the opinions of others imposed upon him; but when a man objects to any imposition of his own opinions, he gives proof that he understands, and is prepared to carry out, the principles of religious liberty.

Such, then, in brief, is the story of our fathers, and of the liberty wherewith they have made us free. It may be said, What else could they do, if they had a conscience? Well, it is something to have a conscience, and act up to it; and much to have a conscience that does not quail in danger and suffering, and does not shrink from hardship and fines and imprisonment and death!

But we have reached a point at which liberty is much more to us than a necessity of conscience; and we associate it, not so much with what we may suffer for it, as with the wide field it opens to us for the exercise of sympathy and for attainment in knowledge and piety.

It would take me over too much ground if I were to consider all the ways in which our free position enlarges our resources in the quest for truth, and pure and undefiled religion; I will, therefore, confine myself to one immense gain, which has been always specially valued by myself—I mean in the range of our fellowships.

I am fully aware, Gentlemen, that from individual differences you may be drawn in other directions than those in which I have been most drawn; but in illustrating the great benefit of having all the world before us where to choose, I shall, probably, best accomplish my object by stating where I have myself found most to sympathise with, most help, and most joy.

From those who, in the ordinary course of things, fill the pulpits of the leading denominations, not much, perhaps, is to be gained. They are too busy, go too much in ruts, are too much of a regulation pattern to be students and thinkers. They have

usually good average abilities, but they devote themselves to the application of generally-received opinions, and to keeping things as they are. Emerson noticed in England what he had already noticed in his own country, that the men of trust and consideration were by no means the men of largest power or highest nature, but men of mercantile activity and working ability, who could best push their forces to a lucrative point. They may afford us some useful hints as to adaptability to present requirements in reaching the people; but they are not pioneers, and will hardly be of much service in regard to that culture which consists in "an acquaintance with the best that has been said and written." I would, however, make an exception so far as the leaders of great movements are concerned, for they are usually men of originality and character, who have the courage of their convictions, and, to go no farther than the High Church and Broad Church movements, have given us the works of Newman and Keble, of Maurice, Dean Stanley, Jowett, and Robertson.

Whatever our desire for catholic fellowship may be, it can, indeed, be enjoyed only to a very limited extent among the living. One dreams sometimes of the growth of a liberality, through which those who are devoting themselves to the moral and religious welfare of mankind will say to one another, "We have all the same object in view, and are working for the same end; let us no longer hold aloof from one another, but, uniting as far as we are able, and trusting in the truth which makes for freedom, and the freedom which makes for truth, let us open our minds and hearts to one another, and endeavour to bring together all the light and the life there are, for our mutual benefit and the benefit of the nation." But most men have labels, which are the only bond of union, and conceal what we should most like to know. One often longs to tear off these labels, and look a little into what lies beneath. What a good and delightful thing it would be if those who, in some points, differ from one another, could talk over their points of difference and agreement in an

amicable spirit and on equal terms! How much I should like to ask many a man, whom I know only as at a distance, what he means by what he says, and how he has come to think and feel as he does, and to answer such questions for myself! How good and delightful it would be if, in our great national sanctuaries, there could be, from time to time, a simple, and perhaps mainly symbolical, religious service, in which all might be invited to join, forgetting all diversity in the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace! This is a state of things of the coming of which there are some signs; but it is too far off for me to see it—the dividing lines are too marked, and can only gradually become less so; the gulf of separation is too wide, and can only gradually be narrowed. Yet you young men may live to welcome this blessed day; and I fervently hope you may.

Happily, however, there are no such restrictions in the fellowship of books. We are as free to commune with the great dead, and their great thoughts, as we are with the members of our own households. Those who are divided from us in their lives, whether by sect or time, may be united to us by their writings.

Consider, Gentlemen, the advantage of our free position in this respect—the help there is in it, the fearlessness of it, the hopefulness of it, the love it may shed abroad in our hearts. How could you think of yourselves as worthy of the name of Biblical students, if you were to cut yourselves off from the scholars of Germany and Holland and France? In philosophy who of us can doubt that others, as well as ourselves, will be gainers by an exchange of thought on the "Theories of Ethics," and the "Study of Religion?" Who can help feeling an enlargement in our conception of the divine greatness from the wonderful researches of science into the history of our world, the grandeur of the Universe, and the infinitude of the ages?

As life goes on, and our studies are continued, one of the things which must strike us is the change which is constantly taking place in theological and Biblical theories, as in all things

on their scientific side; and when we find ourselves laying aside the volumes which once were relied on by us as authorities, for others which are, as we say, brought up to the knowledge of the times, we are strengthened in our attachment to those writers who have given a perfect and inspiring expression to the great moral and religious sentiments which are the permanent basis of goodness and piety. Instructors are for their generation; prophets are for mankind. There are hardly any ideas of religion so simple as not to undergo some change in their intellectual form; but spirit is substance, and its elements are abiding. We perceive the difference when we compare what Henry Vaughan wrote as a physician, and what he wrote as a poet; Baxter, as a controversialist, and Baxter, as the author of "The Saint's Rest;" the "Vulgar Errors" of Sir Thomas Browne, and his "Religio Medici." How sweet it is to let Jeremy Taylor talk with us of "Holy Living and Dying," and to pray with him in the "Golden Grove;" to quaff deep draughts from the overflowing stream of Thomas Fuller's genial, humorous, and pathetic wisdom; and to listen to the majestic periods of John Milton, as they roll in upon us with the grandeur and music of Atlantic waves!

In the use of our freedom it is well for us to seek out writers who, in some respects, are a contrast to ourselves. To those of us whose habit it is to submit all subjects to calm reason, good sense, and careful criticism, it is desirable that there should be seasons of communion with men whose fervid temperament and experience of inward conflict enable them to take us to the heights and depths of spiritual life; that, for instance, we should not let our objection to much of the theology of St. Augustine prevent us from having our souls kindled by the passionate spirituality of his "Confessions." To the rational Christian, I would especially commend the friendship of the mystics. I remember the time when rational Christians looked upon themselves and the mystics as belonging to different worlds; but so far from our predilection for a reasonable Christianity being properly a cause for turning

away from the mystics, it seems to me that we need their fellowship all the more. There is nothing inconsistent between the reason and the affections. I am not sure we always understand what our real belief is. We think we believe what we can give our reasons for believing; but belief and unbelief are often on grounds deeper than reasons. The mystics dwelt in a region of feeling, in which they realised more than most others the meaning of the Beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." They raised the temperature of piety by the warmth of their love, and are to the Church at large what times of prayer and meditation are to the individual. Mysticism has often been regarded as unpractical on account of its indefiniteness; but nothing is more practical than love, and the indefiniteness complained of is, perhaps, the indefiniteness of music and symbols, and arises from the impossibility of putting into adequate words the inspiration of the Infinite Spirit. For myself, I confess that nothing is to me more quickening and renovating and peace-giving than an occasional hour with Thomas á Kempis and Tauler, and such kindred souls as George Herbert and Henry Vaughan. Sir Walter Scott tells us that in Queen Anne's time there was a party called *Whimsicals*, because they were sometimes actuated by principles, and sometimes by feelings; but I am persuaded that all the principles which are most operative for good have in them a large ingredient of feeling!

Apart from the highways of religious belief there are quiet nooks in which we may enjoy companionship with men of the most elevated type, reminding us of those lines of Wordsworth:—

> "More sweet than odours caught by him who sails
> Near spicy shores of Araby the blest,
> A thousand times more exquisitely sweet,
> The freight of holy feeling which we meet,
> In thoughtful moments wafted by the gales
> From fields where good men walk, or bowers wherein they rest."

There are the Cambridge Platonists, John Smith, Henry More, Cudworth, and others, who "studied to propagate better thoughts

to take men off from being parties, or from narrow notions, from superstitious conceits, and fierceness about opinions." They recognised reason as a beam of God, but only as one of the beams of that great sun which illumines also the conscience and the heart, and so quickens in our whole nature a divine life. There are the Quietists, with Fenelon and Madame Guyon, by whom we are lifted above all sordid notions of heaven and hell into a religion of the love of God and goodness for their own sake. There is also a small body, which has almost gone out of reckoning in the Christianity of England at the present day, but from which, as it seems to me, more is to be learnt worth thinking about and preserving than from the most popular religious body of our times—I mean the Society of Friends, whose external singularities and want of adaptation to some parts of human nature should not hide from us how deeply, in some respects, they penetrated the veil of the religious life. When we say that we must go on from the Roman Catholic principle of the authority of the Church, and the Protestant principle of the authority of a book to the witness of God's spirit with our spirit, as the true foundation of religion, we are but repeating what was held from the first by the Society of Friends. When Emerson tells us that "sensible men and conscientious men all over the world are of one religion," he is but putting into his own words what had already been said by William Penn:—"I ever have thought there has been one true religion in the world, and that is the work of the spirit of God in the hearts and souls of men. And they that have been led by it are the good people of every dispensation of God to the world." If you want a little bit of primitive Christianity of the last century—in which it was not too prevalent—read the journal of John Woolman, a book almost unknown in the religious world, but precious to Coleridge and Charles Lamb.

It is no part of my object or my desire to press upon you my own favourite authors; and if I have mentioned some of the

books I love best, it is not that others may not be more to you, but by way of illustrating the wealth of fellowship which is accessible to us through our free position. None of us can extract all the elements of life and beauty there are in the spiritual world, any more than any single plant or tree can extract all the beneficent elements there are in the earth and the air and the sunshine; but we may extract what we can, and appreciate and profit by what is extracted by others. From the High Church we may learn something as to the beautifying of our religious services, and setting in order our solemn times, without sacrificing the backbone of personal conviction by sacerdotal usages, and bowing our necks to the yoke of a priesthood. The very word humanity is enough to awaken in us an interest in those who speak of a "religion of humanity"; for to us the religion of Christ is the religion of humanity. We, too, are for humanity, which is to us itself religious, and higher as the worshipper than as the object of worship. Those whose sympathy with sorrow and distress has made social questions their one concern shall not be strangers to us if they show us how better to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. I am thankful to truth-loving men, who, if they are silent, or even averse in regard to some things which are to me of supreme importance, can yet teach me more of the laws of nature and the conditions of welfare in the life that now is. Notwithstanding the modest neutrality of Charles Darwin in matters of faith, I cannot help thinking that the necessity for the re-statement of views of which we hear so much, is in no small degree owing to him, and that the theory of evolution, which he applied to the outward things of time, may be applied in confirmation of what Paul said of "the earnest expectation of the creation waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God."

Probably the form in which we may most hope for progress in religion, is through a different estimate of the points on which most "emphatic stress" is to be laid. I fully believe, with Dean

Stanley, that a difference in this respect will open in the New Testament itself the materials for a new epoch. Out of the old Christianity which we have known so long, and in defence of which so much has been said and written, and so many safeguards have been raised, there will grow up a Christianity which will be its own evidence, the spirit of Christ bearing witness with our spirits, and proving itself to be divine by the human blessings it confers. The simpler and broader the basis of our faith, the surer may be our trust in it, and the more we may build on it. But no basis of religion will suffice without times of renewal from the presence of the Lord. It is only through a revelation that is never closed that we can be brought into living touch with the Father of our spirits.

Freedom does not mean that we have no preferences, no especial sympathies, no traditions and examples which we cherish, no memorials which are sacred to us, no fathers in the faith, no Church which is to us as a home; but that there are no artificial restraints on our knowledge, or our judgment, or our affections, and that in the Church which is our home we are not, and never will be, shut up, or in any way cut off from other Churches or the outer world. Goodwill is not limited by the conditions of personal intercourse, and improves and sweetens the atmosphere, even where it does not lead to worshipping together or active co-operation. The City of God has its families and friends and neighbours and citizens; and the various relations into which, under these names, we are brought with our fellow-men may co-exist without interfering with one another, and, indeed, must co-exist to form a true City of God. That there are so many Christian sects is of itself a proof that Christ is of no sect. He was for God and humanity, and to him union with God was the unity of mankind.

Oh, Gentlemen! when I contrast our catholic position with our position, as it would be, if we suffered ourselves to "be cribbed, cabined, and confined" within the precincts of any

denomination in Christendom, well may we be thankful for the advantages and fellowship we may enjoy through our free position. True, it permits us to be as negative as we please, as cold and bare in our worship; but it renders available to us all the most elevating and glowing elements of the religious life. Though we be outwardly one of the smallest of religious bodies, we may really be of the largest body in our sympathies and our libraries; we may belong to the most numerous Church, have the fullest calendar of saints, the richest inheritance of the past, and the most glorious hopes for the future. I care little for that freedom which does not make us "riper, and richer, and more enriching." If the freest churches are not the most devout, and the most fruitful in blessings for mankind, they ought to be, and I believe they will be. And if the hope in freedom which animated John Milton were disappointed in his days, those grand words in which he expressed it still remain as a prophecy to be fulfilled, perhaps in our day or yours, with fresh inspiration in them for you and for me: "Now once again by all concurrence of signs, and by the general instinct of holy and devout men, as they daily and solemnly express their thoughts, God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his Church, even to the reforming of the Reformation itself."

My friends, I cannot close this Address without some reference to the deep sorrow we all feel at the loss of one whose connection with this College was of the closest kind. First he was one of its most distinguished students; afterwards he was one of its secretaries for many years; and always he has been among its warmest friends and supporters. None of us who heard his Address, as Visitor, two years ago, can forget it. How little did we then think that the lips to which we listened with such rapt attention were so soon to be closed for this world. With abilities which would have ensured him success in any of the professions, or in the service of the State, his choice was to devote himself to the Christian ministry, to which he brought a

culture the widest, the highest, and the most solid. If he used too unsparingly his characteristic vigour of mind and body, I think we all shared his reliance that it would meet every call he might make on it. His writings, especially in connection with the history of the Church, have given him a high place in the religious literature of our times. He was strong every way; and in his strength there was what greatly enhances the value of strength, though not necessarily combined with it—a marked delicacy of touch in his handling of spiritual subjects. Were there a wrong to denounce, there was the force of a prophet in his words and in his tones; but it was evident also how truly he had learnt "the sweet reasonableness" of the Master whom most of all he served. Good and strong everywhere, it seems to me that in the pulpit he was at his best, when his strength was softened into tenderness, and he was as persuasive as he was convincing, as "full of sweetness" as he was "of light," and the manliness of his understanding spoke out of the fulness of his heart. Looking to him as we did, to represent us on so many public occasions, we cannot but feel how much poorer we are now that he is gone. We, seniors, mourn a friend and companion whom we honoured and loved and looked up to as a standard-bearer among us; and you, my younger brothers, will not be without a deepened sense of your responsibility when you think that among the places you will have to fill is that which he has left vacant. God grant that there may not be wanting in your ranks some on whom may fall the mantle of Charles Beard! Among the remembered words of the Address, to which I have referred, there were these: "We will lay no wreath of posthumous renown upon brows that are still strong in a beautiful old age." Alas! that such a wreath should so soon be laid on his own tomb; but it is a genuine wreath of affection and honour, the flowers of which will not soon fade or lose any of their fragrance! There are in that Address a few other words which I should like to recall, because they so admirably sum up what I have been trying to say to you

to-day:—"I have no fear for either the learning or the freedom of the College; an institution that has been faithful to its principles for a hundred years does not begin to belie them then. But I shall not believe that it is doing its perfect work until all its students have found the last religious secret of these troubled times—the union of the largest freedom of inquiry and an uncompromising devotion to facts of nature and of grace, with a piety that lies in the hand of God always, and an all-daring, all-sacrificing charity."

H. Rawson & Co., Printers, 16, New Brown Street, Manchester.—[10760].